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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the philosophical and methodological perspectives of qualitative research and the guiding principles of confluent education. The paper presents issues, concerns, and criticisms of both paradigms and discusses areas for their mutual support and improvement. Qualitative research has established itself as a research methodology built on certain characteristics: (1) the social context determines the meanings and actions of participants; (2) researcher reflection and metacognition are essential elements to be completed throughout the research work; and (3) it is process oriented. Confluent education proposes educational principles for teaching and learning that support the importance of the individual, democratic social change, and the use of self-reflection (Shapiro, 1997). Based on an examination of the literature, three categories are common to qualitative research and confluent education, including: (1) social context; (2) reflection and metacognition; and (3) a process orientation. Qualitative research provides theoretical and philosophical perspectives for confluent educators that address issues of community and interdependence as opposed to individualism. Confluent educators support the work of researchers with practical experiences in the use of reflection and metacognition. This paper considers the implications for educational researchers and provides recommendations for ways to develop educational initiatives that strengthen researcher skills. (EH)

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Qualitative Research and Confluent Education:
A Method for the Study of Differences and the Expression of Diversity

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the philosophical and methodological perspectives of qualitative research and the guiding principles of Confluent Education. It presents issues, concerns and criticisms of both paradigms and discusses areas for their mutual support and improvement . Qualitative Research has established itself as a research methodology built on certain characteristics: 1) the social context determines the meanings and actions of participants; 2) researcher reflection and metacognition are essential elements to be completed throughout the research work; and 3) it is process oriented. Confluent Education proposes educational principles for teaching and learning that support the importance of the individual, democratic social change, and the use of self-reflection (Shapiro, 1997). Based on an examination of the literature, three categories are common to Qualitative Research and Confluent Education: social context, reflection and metacognition, and a process orientation. Qualitative research provides theoretical and philosophical perspectives for Confluent educators that address issues of community and interdependence as opposed to individualism. Confluent educators support the work of researchers with practical experiences in the use of reflection and metacognition. This paper considers the implications for educational researchers and provides a few recommendations for how to develop educational initiatives that strengthen researcher skills.

Qualitative Research and Confluent Education:

A Method for the Study of Differences and the Expression of Diversity

The challenge to understand and appreciate differences as issues of diversity become foremost in the minds of educators, is increasingly important. Every effort must be made to "enact the democratic and equitable intent of a socially responsive education" (Stringer, 1993, p. 150), and to use research as a way "to refine social theory rather than merely describe social life" (Carspecken, 1996, p.3). Research paradigms that support and respect cultures and lifestyles need to provide all members of society with the opportunity to fully realize their hopes, dreams and potentials. Addressing issues of equity from a coherent and reflective research perspective is essential if differences are to be valued and power structures minimized. Yet, "power is always present in any attempt to know, indeed power works its effects through its intimate interconnection with knowledge" (Usher, 1997, p. 33).

Qualitative Research methods and the principles of Confluent Education may provide a method for the study of differences and the expression of diversity. The qualitative research "method reflects a bedrock assumption held historically by field workers, that experience underlies all understanding of social life" (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 3), and that the context is an essential component of the researcher's description (Berg, 1998; Denzin, 1985; Van Maanen, 1983). Qualitative research examines patterns of interaction, qualities and feelings, and is uniquely suited for "strategies to study people in diverse natural settings where researchers are personally involved as their own instrument–in interviewing, observing, studying documents, analyzing data, and creating a narrative to present to the world" (Brown, J. R. 1996, p. 13). Further, "qualitative researchers assume that behavior is significantly influenced by the setting in which it occurs" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 30). In fact, qualitative researchers "are most interested in how humans arrange themselves and their settings and how inhabitants of these settings make sense of their surroundings" (Berg, 1998, p. 7).

The guiding principles of Confluent Education emphasize the importance of understanding and appreciating differences, and of actions, feelings, and interpersonal relationships within a social context as integral components of interaction (Brown, G. 1972; Brown, J. H., 1996). "Confluent Education is a major variant in the humanistic genre" that is strongly influenced by Gestalt theory, and most recently applied to organizations (Shapiro, 1997). It can be described as the "flowing together of the affective and cognitive elements in individual and group learning" (Brown, G., 1972). Confluent Education necessitates an awareness of content and process, and "means being aware of, and taking responsibility for yourself in relation to your experience and your context, people you're interacting with, [and] the topic and material you're engaging in" (Brown, J., 1996, p. 6). These principals are similar to qualitative research in emphasizing the importance of process, social interaction, and the feelings of others. Research which provides for an increased awareness, discussion and implementation of these principles may benefit educators in the creation of classroom communities that foster mutual and supportive relationships.

Although the two paradigms, Qualitative Research and Confluent Education, emerge from somewhat different philosophical orientations and perspectives, there are overlapping areas and guiding principles from both paradigms that can be applied and utilized. Therefore, the goal of this paper is twofold: 1) to contribute to a better understanding of both qualitative research as a methodology and the principles of Confluent Education; and 2) to examine in what ways these two paradigms can contribute to a research epistemology that supports different perspectives and fosters a mutual appreciation of differences. It presents a brief review of the theoretical perspectives and data collection procedures of qualitative research methods, and contrasts them with the guiding principles of Confluent Education. Three major themes are identified and discussed as significant components of qualitative research and Confluent Education:

1) the social context or whole influences all of the parts and the participants;
2) reflective practice and metacognition are important for increasing awareness, understanding and appreciation of difference;
3) the process of interaction is significant to the interpretation of the context.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

The theoretical perspectives that guide the discussion in this paper are derived from social science and qualitative research (Denzin, 1992; Dewey, 1930; Goffman, 1958; McLaren, 1992; Miles & Huberman, 1994), and from the principles of Confluent Education (Brown, G., 1972; Brown, J. H., 1996; Brown J. R., 1996; Korb, Gorrell, & Van De Riet, 1989; Shapiro, 1997).

Qualitative Research Methodology

Over the past fifteen years, as a methodology, qualitative research and ethnography have become more accepted and respected as legitimate forms of research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Wolcott, 1988, 1990). In large part, the qualitative perspective and interpretation relies on the notion that social experiences occur within multi-layered contexts, and that this requires a method that examines the "whole" as opposed to discrete quantifiable units. "Qualitative social research investigates human phenomena that do not lend themselves, by their very nature, to quantitative methods" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 3). Describing differences in worldview and understanding the "lived experience" of another is a process which requires a method for "locating the meanings people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives ... and connecting these meanings to the social world around them" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). Qualitative research provides this opportunity through philosophical perspectives based in social constructivism and postmodernism, and, as others have noted, can be particularly useful in research that examines oral and written narrative forms (Bruner, 1986/1996; Gergen, 1994; Goody & Watt, 1968; Linde, 1993).

Qualitative research focuses on communities, feelings and beliefs and "demonstrates the fruitfulness and often, the greater depth of understanding we can derive from this method" (Berg, 1998, p. 2). This emphasizes the "lived experience of participators ... [and] investigators must be able to handle all realms of human experience—not to analyze them, not even to understand them, but to be able to listen and truly take in the meaning of the other's lived experience" (Brown, J. R., 1996, p. 32). Yet, the actual experience of fieldwork is more than the researcher's description of a setting. It is also the "quality of our response to the event and our capacity to enter into the lives of

others that helps us to make their lives and experiences our own" (Moraga & Anzaldua, 1981, p. 27).

In this paper, four research perspectives, symbolic interactionism, social constructivism, postmodernism and poststructuralism, and critical theory provide the basis of discussion and are not considered completely separate philosophies. These perspectives are guided by social science research and philosophical orientations that are built upon, overlapping, and/or situated among each other. Based on certain characteristics and qualities addressed in the literature seven categories are noteworthy for comparison across perspectives: social context, relationships, feeling and affect, reflection, metacognition, narrative, and a process orientation. A comparison of these philosophical orientations can be found in Table 1. Although the discussion of these philosophies is very brief, it is not meant to minimize the in-depth thought , attention and work evident behind these theories. It is meant, however, to provide a basic overview for the discussion of qualitative research with reference to the principles of Confluent Education. Further, it is not meant to arbitrarily classify theorists into one methodological category or another, rather, it is designed to indicate primary preference or association with a perspective. Table 2 presents a listing of each of the perspectives discussed in this section, and some of the philosophical and methodological theorists that contributed to or are associated with each perspective.

Symbolic Interactionism:

This is one of the theoretical schools of social science research that provides a perspective for the description and explanation of certain aspects of human behavior, and is often attributed to the work of social behaviorists (Blumer, 1969; Dewey, 1930; Goffman, 1958; Mead,.1934). Symbolic interactionism is a "set of related propositions that describe and explain certain aspects of human behavior" (Berg, 1998, p. 8), and supports three key assumptions: 1) that human interactions are the primary source of data; 2) the participant's perspectives and their ability to empathize with others are key issues; and 3) the way in which participant's define the social context or setting determines the nature and meaning of their actions (Berg, 1998).

For the symbolic interactionist, in order to understand the meanings that emerge from interactions, the researcher "must enter into the defining process or develop sufficient appreciation for the process that understandings can become clear" (Berg, 1998, p. 10). In addition, John-Steiner, Panofsky and Smith (1994) describe the interactionist perspective as a unifying principle in which context is important, and a focus on process is a necessary understanding of that context. This emphasizes the notion that the setting and the process of interaction between participants in the setting are essential to social science research as well as qualitative research. Denzin and Guba (1994) view this as contributing important perspectives in the research narrative, and note that social interactionists "don't like theories which ignore the biographies and lived experiences of interacting individuals ... or the stories people tell one another about life experiences" (p. 24).

Social Constructivism:

In the past, a dominant influence in educational research has been that of positivism, which supports the notion that values can be separated from facts, and the researcher's task is to uncover and report on these facts (Scott, 1997). Currently, however, the more commonly supported notion in social science research is that what is reported by the researcher is not merely the facts, and is not "objective, [or] separate from the value positions of the researcher and representative of intransitive reality" (Scott, 1997, p. 155). The relationships of the researcher with the participants, community, or social setting are important considerations and reflect the perspectives presented in the research.

Social constructivism supports the notion of interpersonal relationships as the central theme of social science research, not an individual researcher working on a topic or subject, but a community working together toward an understanding of a complex process. For social constructivists "descriptions and explanations ... are the result of human coordination of action, [and] words take on their meaning only within the context of ongoing relationship" (Gergen, 1994, p. 49). This is based in the work of notable phenomenologists and existentialists such as Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty.

Social constructivism examines the research act as two processes interacting simultaneously: one as actively constructing a "case" from a social setting, and two, as a constructed representation of the knowledge gained (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Denzin, 1992; Denzin & Guba, 1994; Usher, 1997). As researchers, we are constructing and working toward the completion of an unknown, a whole formerly unrecognized by ourselves and others, and it is not just in the reflecting, reporting or representing, but the actual process of constructing a narrative account with others that contributes to the final research product. This incorporates the intrapersonal responses of the researcher and the interpersonal relationships that are established in the social context. The participants' narratives as well as the researchers' narratives are important for the overall contextualization and interpretation of meaning. This is a primary quality of social constructivism that ultimately, results in the finished product or research narrative. The research narrative is not a disembodied piece of literature or "fact" once completed, it is a construction of one experience that continues to affect and effect the participants beyond the research act. In this way, research "does not passively reflect, it actively constructs–but it does so in a particular way" (Usher, 1997, p. 35). Furthermore, "whether a narrative is perceived as being fact or fiction depends not upon the intention of the *author*, but the perceptions of what is true by the *reader*" (Packwood & Sikes, 1996, p. 343).

Postmodernism and Poststructuralism:[1]

Postmodernism essentially began with the work of Jacques Derrida (1973) and deconstruction theory. His work is a reaction to the philosophies of phenomenology and existentialism. The phenomonologists and existentialists maintain that we do not see objects, or abstract concepts and ideas, rather we experience them as phenomena, connected through feelings and the experience. Essentially (although brief), Derrida states that truth cannot be ensured by the presence of a phenomena or object. To say that we know or have knowledge of something does not reflect objective reality since it is not possible to be objectively aware of something without being aware of being aware, asserting then that "presence is nothing other than a belief, not a certainty" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 13). From this perspective, it would appear that postmodernism would be

difficult to utilize as a research paradigm since the underlying assumption of research is to discover, frame, retell, state, pose or suggest the presence or existence of a philosophy, perspective, phenomena or reality, not a discussion of beliefs. Therefore, what elements of postmodernist theory can be identified and utilized that might support a research paradigm that values social context, process, and relationships?

In general, postmodernist researchers consider the following areas as significant to a discussion of research discourse: 1) the researcher's reflective practices and the notion that the "ideologies that shape and frame the research are reflected in the metaphors we use to conceptualize the process", and 2) an understanding and appreciation for "research as narrative" (Packwood & Sikes, 1996). The area of the researcher's reflective practices are essential and unavoidable elements of the qualitative research base in the postmodern tradition (Lather, 1991; Scott, 1997; Usher, 1997). This refers to an "examination of both the researcher's own conceptual and affective maps, and the way those maps mediate and structure reality for the research, and what is being researcher" (Scott, 1997, p. 156).

The second area, supports the notion of the research as narrative and a process orientation when completing any research. It proposes the ideologies, metaphors and symbols that researchers use in their descriptions, shape, frame and reflect the findings into a particular perspective, viewpoint, or attitude (Packwood & Sikes, 1996). Postmodernists suggest that research is an act layered with value-laden assumptions and driven, in many instances, by structures of power and preference, and they endeavor to understand and conceptualize the setting through the use reflection and metacognition during the process. In fact, the way in which we as researchers give voice, not only to those under study, but to ourselves in the research narrative is important to an understanding of one of the myths of so called value-free research. Stanley and Wise (1993) describe this myth as one of "hygienic research in which no problems occur, no emotions are involved" (p. 153), and the processes are free of subjective responses. Yet, as Hargeaves (1994) notes an underlying assumption of the postmodern paradigm is an awareness that there is no social reality that actually exists since, as Derrida (1973) asserts, it is only a belief. Ultimately, "all that is

available, analytically, to the postmodern theorist is the practice of deconstructing existing versions of social reality, and of giving voice to other versions which are normally neglected and suppressed" (p. 39). Therefore, the processes involved in the research act are integral to an understanding of the setting, and the knowledge and awareness gained is an intimate part of the process itself.

Finally, postmodernism acknowledges the primary focus of research as narrative of the "individual and the acknowledgment of the situated, partial nature of knowledge claims within the context" (Packwood & Sikes, 1996). For postmodernists, there is a research process (fieldwork) and research text (narrative) that are developed by and through the actions of the researcher (storyteller) as a way of connecting the past with the present. The telling, writing and reporting of the research story are a narrative of the experiences, understandings, and knowledge construction of the researcher and others working together in a process (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Denzin, 1985; Packwood & Sikes, 1996; Usher, 1997). The ultimate value of qualitative research and ethnography may be in the telling of stories, in the juxtaposition of action and consciousness, and in the narratives of the collaborators and researcher. The use of narrative may provide one of the best avenues for the dissemination of qualitative research through the process of self-reflection and metacognition, not the self-indulgence of self-conscious introspection or the "dilemma of self-as-special" (Gardner, 1983). This proposes then, the deconstruction of the research process from a meta-narrative, which supports certain value assumptions, to the authentic narratives of individuals (Packwood & Sikes, 1996).

Critical Theory:

Critical Theory has emerged as a reaction to postmodernism, and provides "principles for conducting valid inquiries into any area of human experience" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 8). Critical qualitative research "is one of several genres of inquiry into nonquantifiable features of social life" and human agency, and the researchers are "concerned about social inequalities"(Carspecken, 1996, p. 3) in society, research, and education (Freire, 1996; McLaren, 1992; Macedo, 1994). American pragmatists such as John Dewey, William James, and George Herbert Mead provide a

theoretical framework for the study of equitable relations, and the expression and meaning of democratic education. The theory implies a value orientation that does not necessarily need to match that of the researcher. Criticalists ask questions such as, "Whose interests are being served in social acts of doing research? What principles should we choose in structuring our pedagogical efforts?" (Lankshear & McLaren, 1996, p. 381). These questions require the researcher to engage in the examination of a meta-perspective, not focusing on personal perspective, but using reflection and metacognition as a way of stepping back from the process to examine values and ideas.

The major contribution and strength of critical theorists is the notion that perception and individual human agency are not "root metaphors" for qualitative research or education. Derrida successfully addresses the problematic reliance by phenomenologists and constructivists on presence and reality, and his work is supported by critical theorists in that visual perceptions or phenomena are not taken as truth or knowledge. As Carspecken (1996) notes, "Derrida has convincingly undermined traditional appeals to presence as the basis of truth ... [and] visual perception should not be a taken-for-granted basis of epistemology; yet it is such a basis in mainstream conceptions of validity, reliability, and data interpretation" (p. 16). However, as with poststructuralism and the Frankfurt School, criticalists are opposed to the "bureaucratic colonization of the life-world" and the subordination of other cultural perspectives in favor of the so-called scientific or Western culture (Peters, 1996, p. 7).

Critical theorists attempt to use their work as a form of social or cultural criticism, they support the notion that all thought is mediated by power relations, and that language is central to the formation of subjectivity (Carspecken, 1996; Lather, 1991). Lankshear and McLaren (1996) describe critical research as:

> A view of culture that focuses on disjuncture, rupture, and contradiction. Culture is best understood as a terrain of contestation that serves as a locus of multivalent practical and discursive structures and powers. Knowledge is construed as a form of discursive production ... The rules of discourse are normative and derive their

> meaning from the power relations in which they are embedded. Discourses organize a way of thinking into a way of doing (p. 381).

The critical theorist examines the underlying assumptions of power and inequities that are present in the discourse and the way they are represented through culture and language. Hence, criticalists generally find narratives problematic, particularly when they are presented as a mutual construction. In addition, it can never be that knowledge is solely what a culture describes, but rather, the description is a way of minimizing the influence of certain portions of the population and limiting their degree of influence in the culture. Knowledge is understood to be what those in power interpret knowledge to be in order to maintain their own power and influence.

Pure postmodernism undermines the notion that helping the disadvantaged is an activity that is "desirable, moral, good, and right", and that there is no advantage to studying oppression since "any theory of social structure and power is deconstructable" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 15). Further, criticalists find fault with various educational methods that are "working from within a discourse of critical rationalism which reifies the humanist subject–the rational, self-motivating, autonomous agent–as a subject of history, change, and resistance" (Lankshear & McLaren, 1996). This theory of individualism or the importance of individuals is a particularly Western notion that does not perceive of a community perspective in the same way as many Indigenous groups. They criticize constructivists over the ambiguity of "whether individuals or cultural groups are the constructing agents for any particular reality ... [and] by failing to break with mainstream perceptual metaphors altogether"(Carspecken, 1996, p. 17), assert that constructivism does not offer productive alternatives.

These research perspectives provide an, albeit brief, philosophical and theoretical orientation to qualitative methodologies that are based in interactionist and postmodern philosophies. The research perspectives overlap in several areas of philosophical orientation, and yet, each provides another orientation and/or direction for research methodology. In general, three of the seven categories presented in Table 1 are common among the four perspectives: social context, reflection and/or metacognition, and process orientation. Table 3 indicates the relative

importance for each perspective of the three similar categories rated according to primary, secondary and tertiary. For purposes here, they provide a context to examine the guiding principals of Confluent Education, and the themes of awareness of self and other.

Confluent Education Perspectives

Confluent Education is a philosophy and approach to teaching and learning that includes the cognitive and affective domains (Brown, G. I., 1990; Brown, J. R., 1996). It is based in several of the philosophical perspectives previously discussed: phenomenology (Husserl, Heidegger); existentialism (Sartre, Merleau-Ponty); constructivism, and pragmatism (Dewey, James); and that of the Gestaltists, most notably Wertheimer, Koffka, and Lewin. Table 2 indicates the major philosophical and methodological theorists that are referred to by Confluent Educators. Table 1 presents the seven categories of social context, relationships, feeling and affect, reflection, metacognition, narrative, and process found in qualitative methods and as they apply to Confluent Education.

The cognitive (intellectual functioning) and the affective (feeling and emotional aspects) domains for Confluent Education are assumed to be an important part of the teaching and learning process that makes activities and interaction personally meaningful (Brown, J. R., 1996: Hackbarth, 1996). According to Hackbarth (1996), "the confluence of the cognitive and affective dimensions of learning may be interpreted as a person's actions directed toward the pursuit of knowledge" (p. 30). The teacher's goal is to help students achieve a balance between cognitive and affective learning, and to experience a sense of freedom. In addition, it is designed to help students increase their sense of power in the process thereby taking responsibility for their own learning (Brown, G. I., 1990). In fact, "modern pedagogy is moving increasingly to the view that the [student] should be aware of her own thought processes, and that it is crucial for the pedagogical theorist and teacher alike to help her become more metacognitive–to be as aware of how she goes about her learning and thinking as she is about the subject matter she is studying" (Bruner, 1996, p. 64). Metacognition is described as a "view from a distance, a vantage point that allows a broader scope of a situation" (Brown, J. R. 1996, p. 74). It allows the learner (or researcher), has the

opportunity to consider how they are thinking as well as what they are thinking about (Bruner, 1996).

Confluent Education, as suggested in its name, is the coming together or confluence of several philosophical orientations: phenomenology, existentialism, constructivism, humanism and Gestalt theory. Remaining in the moment, preoccupation with process, awareness of moment-to-moment change, interpersonal and intrapersonal perspectives, reflection and metacognition, feeling and affect are important conceptions in Confluent Education based on these philosophies. Gestalt is a German word that is not translatable in English into one word. It represents three phenomena: a thing, its context or environment, and the relationship between them (Korb et al., 1989). This notion also could be represented as the individual, in a setting, and what happens between them when they interact. Three central concepts from Gestalt theory are important to consider: 1) the existential, which is the ability to be present in the moment as events emerge; 2) the experiential, which "focuses on the knowledge that emerges from an awareness of any phenomena"; and 3) active experimentation, which incorporates "learning important truths through personal discovery" (Korb et al., 1989).

The existential focus is an awareness of what is happening "right now", a moment-by-moment living of events, changes, and actions. Judith R. Brown (1996) elaborates on the experiential context as one in which the process is intensified through a "here-and-now" focus that emphasizes awareness of self and focuses on the connection of self to the environment and relationships with others (p. 34). Process refers to the experience of the environment, the personal responses of the participants, and the subsequent actions based on the experience. This is similar to L. S. Vygotsky's theory of the act of constructing and construction in which ideas and concepts are presented to the individual from the environment, felt or experienced personally, and then, through the process of theorizing, the concepts are reorganized and understood (Cole, John-Steiner, Scribner & Souberman, 1978). Further, the concept of "self" can be understood as an amalgam of what emerges from a combination of the intrapersonal and interpersonal domains

(Gardner, 1983). We become aware of important truths regarding the nature of relationships "as rich sources of awareness and change" (Korb et al., 1989, p. ix).

Confluent Education emphasizes the relationship between the interpersonal relations and intrapersonal dimension that are so much a part of everyday life as we interact with the environment. These dimensions encompass feelings, attitudes, creativity, and imagination as well as relationships, changing environments, and interaction with others. The focus is on the process of the individual in interaction with the environment and seeks to encompass the social context, setting or field. Being able to establish meaning and understanding what emerges from the field is an organizing principle that allows emergence as opposed to actively looking or finding (Brown, J. R., 1996), and is a central notion of the process orientation.

Finally, in relation to the principles of Confluent Education, the recent work of Stewart Shapiro (1997) is significant to note. In analysis of quantitative data from confluent students at the University of California, Santa Barbara over the years from 1983 to 1990, Shapiro notes " three factors as comprising a major pattern or perspective from which we can observe and describe how Confluent Education is framed by expert in the field" (1997, p. 89). These three factors are: 1) a focus on individualism, which is consistent with the value orientations of the humanistic and Human Potential movements; 2) a belief in participatory democratic values and social change; and 3) self-determined evaluation or an interest in reflection and self-examination. Shapiro (1997) further asserts that these factors are understandable given the "strong tendency to endorse awareness and expression of feelings" or an affective bias, the "authentic expression of feelings" as an avenue for personal growth, and a sense of connectedness that is embodied in the close interaction and sharing of feelings present within a small group setting (p. 95). A representation of the overlapping perspectives and categories from qualitative research and Confluent Education is presented in Figure 1.

From the above discussion of Qualitative Research and Confluent Education, we can infer several meanings:

1. Social Interactionism is a social science method that supports the notion of social context as important for study and research. Social interactionism, critical theory and Confluent Education base part of their philosophical orientations on the American Pragmatists (e. g. Dewey, James).
2. Social Constructivism, like Confluent Education, is based on the work of phenomenologists and existentialists, hence the notion of moment-to-moment interaction and the importance of phenomena in general. Both perspectives support the importance of the individual actively constructing and as being part of the construction process, and are grounded in similar philosophical perspectives.
3. Postmodernism is a reaction to phenomenology and poses some relevant conceptualizations regarding the nature of reality, perception and beliefs. It supports a process orientation, reflection, and narrative as important components of the research process.
4. Critical theory supports some of the postmodernist conclusions regarding the nature of reality and visual perception, and the researcher's interpretation as part of the research act. However, the focus moves beyond that of the individual into the primary realm of social context and the interpretation of that context. It is important not only to tell a research story, but to ask critical questions such as who–what–how–and by what means are research and the writing being used. This is a very different focus than that of the humanists who examine closely the individual in relation to the setting and her responses to the setting.
5. Critical theorists see themselves more closely aligned with poststructuralism in that it draws attention to the dangers of power and the way it is represented through language. It examines "the postmodern age: an era wherein democratic imperatives have been subverted ... emancipatory symbols and their affective power commodified ... an age in which the modernist quest for certainty and meaning and the liberal humanist notion of the individual as a unified and coherent essence and agency are being forcefully challenged" (Lankshear & McLaren, 1996, p. 383).

6. Confluent Education is based primarily in the Western and humanistic perspectives of the individual in which actions, thoughts, beliefs and values are the principal focus. A secondary focus is the emphasis on democratic social change as identified by Shapiro (1997) and is aligned with critical theory.

These ideas will be part of the discussion and implications section of this paper. First, however, it is important to consider data collection and analysis methods since methods can never be separate from philosophy, and, philosophical perspectives can be clearer if applications or actions that reflect those perspectives are presented.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data collection procedures, analysis and ethical considerations must aim toward an accurate representation of contexts and relationships in order to support democratic principals. Any qualitative research "methodology cannot be examined in a vacuum ... data-gathering techniques are intentionally coupled with theoretical perspectives, linking method to theory" (Berg, 1998, p. 4) that must be coherently aligned. Further, as Berg (1998) suggests, data are intricately associated with the motivation for choosing a given subject, the conduct of the study, and ultimately the analysis" (p. 4).

Qualitative research seeks to collect data from the setting or social context, and looks at the relationships, interactions and experiences of individuals within that context. Data collection procedures seek to understand the setting in which actions occur, the feelings and meanings of the relationships of individuals, and the lived personal experience. In fact, most "contemporary qualitative researchers nourish the belief that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered, [and] the world we know is a particularly human construction" (Stake, 1995, p. 99). This notion in educational research has been led primarily by Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln (1985), and has been less than favorably reviewed by critical theorists such as Carspecken (1996) and Lankshear and McLaren (1996). Yet, as Stake (1995) points out the constructivist view is important since it "encourages "thick description" ... [and] helps a case study researcher justify lots of narrative

description" (p. 102). The following section will examine data collection in the areas of collection, analysis, and ethics for consideration when qualitative methodologies are applied.

Data Collection Procedures

In order to understand the phenomena under study, qualitative researchers utilize multiple data collection techniques such as participant observation, interviewing, historical analysis, document and textual analysis, reflective journals, and other unobtrusive techniques to understand the context (Berg, 1998). It is this attention to the context as a "whole" as opposed to the sum of parts that is an important focus in qualitative data collection and research. Confluent Education, as well, necessitates attention to the whole, and the formation and completion of a gestalt. For purposes of this paper, we will examine three qualitative data collection techniques: participant-observation, interviewing and reflective researcher journals.

A primary data collection procedure is participant observation, which is a way of gathering data about a particular social context. It unites two actions "participation in the culture being studied and observation of the patterns" (Jacob, 1987, p. 14) of action within a specific setting. Participant observation "refers to the process in which an investigator establishes and sustains a many-sided and relatively long term relationship with a human association in a natural setting for the purpose of developing an understanding of that association" (Lofland & Lofland, 1984, p. 12). As an actual participant, affective qualities of the experience can be felt more passionately, more deeply than the act of simply observing and attempting to remain outside the interaction (Brown, J. R., 1996; Spradley, 1980). In addition, observation demands increased awareness of events, people, and places, the "interweaving of looking and listening" (Lofland & Lofland 1984; Spradley, 1980).

Data collection methods include interviewing in various forms such as "ethnographic interview which shares many features with the friendly conversation" (Spradley, 1979, p. 58). Interviews can be viewed as an opportunity to establish relationships with others, and a dynamic intersubjective relationship occurs between collaborator and researcher. Interaction between the two parties becomes "the meat and potatoes of interviewing, of people talking to people about their experiences and their reactions to those experiences, their emotions, opinions, attitudes, and beliefs

... forging the pathway to connection with each other" (Brown, J. R. 1996, p. 63). The researcher must be present in the moment, able to maintain flexibility, humor, accepting one's emotions and the ambiguity of each situation (Ely, 1991), and "this truly creative process calls for a fluid and dynamic approach" (Brown, J, R., 1996, p. 29). This close interpersonal relationship examines and focuses on communication patterns and the process of interaction. It is part of the moment-to-moment event that can lead to insights, knowledge, and awareness of the participants, the context, and the self.

The responses of the researcher are also the subject of data collection in the form of reflective journals. They are "the grounds for all our investigations and for our affective investment in our own research projects" (McLaren, 1992, p. 81). By concentrating on the circumstances that attempt to limit the subjective responses of the researcher, valuable information regarding the setting and the experience may be lost. The "postmodern approach to social science highlights the need for researchers to be reflexive and to subject themselves, "as knowledgers, to critical self-scrutiny" (Usher, 1997, p. 36). Further, it is an unfounded belief that we can distance ourselves from any research, and only portray an objective reality as in the "myth of hygienic research". This is "referred to as alienated consciousness, as the disenchantment of knowing, a mode of consciousness that has led to undreamed of technological advances, but has also left us alienated from each other, from nature, and from ourselves (Heshusius, 1994, p. 16). The movement toward "participatory consciousness" in qualitative research emphasizes the awareness of a deeper connection between knower and known, and a desire to let go of the perceived boundaries of self and other (Berman, 1990; Brown, J. R., 1996; Heshusius, 1994; Peshkin, 1988). This "postmodern approach does not simply embrace the alternative hermeneutic/interpretive research tradition since it sees ... [an] emphasis on the 'subjective' instead of the 'objective' as merely a reversal of the polar oppositions" (Usher, 1997, p. 31).

Through personal reflections and metacognition, the researcher has the opportunity to become knowledgeable about processes embedded in the context, and personal assumptions and attitudes. Reflective journals provide the occasion for thinking, feeling and writing about

experiences that are part of the research act, and we can become more knowledgeable about the experiences, feelings and attitudes of others. "We become aware of the complexity, are plunged into uncertainty and disoriented. Yet, this is productive because it draws our attention to the process of world-making and directs us towards a reflective stance" (Usher, 1997, p. 30). We are able to perceive a new perspective or understanding of personal beliefs, values and attitudes, and re-orient ourselves to a different understanding. This may lead to a better awareness of the differences between and among ourselves and others, and the opportunity to reflect on those differences. It is an effort to "*research* the research, to bend the research back upon itself, [and] to ask, by what practices, strategies and devices is world-making achieved?" (Usher, 1997, p. 35). Metacognition provides the space to step back from what we know of ourselves and others in order to examine the differences from another viewpoint.

Data Analysis Considerations

Through the use of participant observation, interviews, and reflective journals multiple sources of data type can be utilized to construct a narrative account. Different data sources support and corroborate findings; "by seeing and hearing multiple instances of it from different sources, by using different methods" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 267) a measure of reliability can be attained. When investigating social situations there is no absolute method to safeguard against error. By following Denzin's (1978) classic distinctions of method that include *data source* (persons, times, places), *method* (observation, interview, document), and *data type* (narrative text, recordings quantitative), a certain degree of trustworthiness from the data may be possible (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Triangulation of data type is deemed a method which supports and provides validity by seeking to verify findings through other related sources. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest triangulation may provide "corroboration but more typically we may be able to bracket the findings, getting something like a confidence interval, even then we are getting reliability and not validity" (p. 267). Triangulation provides researchers with "a better more substantial picture of reality; a richer more complete array of symbols and concepts, and a means of verifying many of these elements" (Berg,

1998, p. 5). We can vary methods, data source, researchers, or data type; Ultimately, however, all sources may only supply a measure of reliability.

Qualitative data collection, like any research, demands certain rules and procedures be followed in order to maintain consistency, to be aware of and seek alternatives in the process, and to closely examine researcher and participant responses. Field notes and interviews must be transcribed and prepared for analysis on a daily basis to discover major themes, concepts and issues. This initial analysis during the field experience provides the opportunity to pose questions, propose preliminary overall concepts, frame questions, and discuss thoughts and ideas with the participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Reflective journals are a way for researchers to spend time thinking, refining, examining and identifying perspectives that can be framed in different perspectives only when actively engaged in the process of writing and reflecting. Journals can be an accurate record for the researcher to return to regarding the process, situations, and the expressed feelings of the moment. A researcher's reflective journal can supply accurate information about the setting, experiences and events as opposed to overall impressions of the whole, which are difficult to separate into occurrences at a later time. Collected documents from the setting provide valuable insights into the policies, goals and context not verbalized or expressed in other ways by participants.

Transcripts of the field notes and interviews can be analyzed from several different perspectives based on a series or interpretations and reviews. As broad categories emerge, they assist in the identification of characteristics and perspectives (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Denzin, 1978, 1992). Scrutiny and coding of these categories can lead to new categories and the organization of data displays. Through these methods, analysis of the data is believed to be reliable, however, criticisms of ethnographic methodology as highly suspect and vulnerable to error exist (Howe & Eisenhart, 1990; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

These considerations in the collection of data through participant observation, interviewing, and reflective journals involve ethical considerations, not only in the collection procedures but also in the crafting of the research narrative.

Ethical Considerations

If research paradigms are to successfully address issues of power, human rights, and an appreciation of difference, we must question "under what conditions and to what ends do we as educational researchers enter into relations of cooperation, mutuality, and reciprocity with those whom we research?" (McLaren, 1992, p. 78). Researchers must assume a responsibility and obligation to participants not to maintain the status quo but to find ways that support alternative perspectives, democratic principles, diversity, feminism, and multiculturalism in the research narrative. Personal reflection, awareness of worldview, and metacognition must be guiding principals of ethical research. With these tools, we may be able to create alternative ways of conceiving of reality making.

Awareness and continual reflection during the research process, allows us to encounter and comprehend personal biases and prejudices, and to remain open to experiences, perspectives, and differences. Through the interpersonal dimension and perspective-taking, we may be able to find a way to achieve mutual understanding even when negotiation fails to bring consensus (Bruner, 1996).This "means coming, not to the truth, but to the truth of oneself, the other person, and the relationship in the moment" (Brown, J. R. 1996, p. 23). Furthermore, Jerome Bruner (1986) reiterates V. W. Turner's remark that researchers must remember there is a "correspondence between life as lived, life as experienced, and life as told, but the anthropologist should never assume the correspondence, or fail to make the distinction" (p. 7).

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Qualitative research methodology is grounded in philosophical traditions and epistemologies that support an understanding of social context, reflection and metacognition, and the time and space orientations of process. For qualitative researchers, the social context and what happens in that context is of primary interest, not the individual researcher, and actions and interactions of the participants are integral to this context. "Qualitative researchers are most interested in how humans arrange themselves and their settings and how inhabitants of these settings make sense of their surroundings through symbols, rituals, social structures, social roles,

and so forth" (Berg, 1998, p. 7). These notions support a method for studying the meanings that individuals place on actions, relationships and context. The focus is less on self, and more on the other and the relationship that develops through the research process. In fact, for critical theorists the self is important only for an awareness of personal perspectives so that the researcher can get out of the way and examine the assumptions from a meta-perspective.

Reflection and metacognition are intimately tied to an understanding of the social context and the writing of the research narrative. Critical research enjoins us to examine the narratives, metaphors, symbols, and discourse that we use in our research. It challenges us to examine the very nature of the language we use in narrative to construct a tale of the participants if we are to promote democratic and equitable principles. As Lankshear and McLaren (1996) caution, "the process of constructing knowledge takes place within an unevenly occupied terrain of struggle in which the dominative discourses of mainstream research approaches frequently parallel the discursive economies of the larger society, and are reinforced by the asymmetrical relations of power and privilege which accompany them" (p. 381). Close examination of the discourse and language we use when writing the research narrative must examine from what perspective the meta-narratives emanate, and by what or whose notions are we constructing the research narrative.

Major questions and difficulties emerge regarding the researcher's abilities for understanding social interactions, using reflection and metacognition, and promoting democratic values and equitable principles such as:

* How is authentic research that respects and values the philosophical perspectives of the participants in a multi-layered social context achieved?
* In what ways can researcher's be trained or informed about the uses of reflective practice and metacognition?
* In what ways can researcher's be guided and supported in their interpretations and understandings of the events and actions that take place within social settings?

Researchers need the opportunity to practice reflective skills as well as group skills and interpersonal interactions under the guidance of experienced facilitators and teachers in order to

gain competence (Martin, Chrispeels, D'Emidio-Caston, in press). Methods from Confluent Education for understanding self, self in the context of groups, and self in the environment provide theories of practice for training qualitative researchers (Shapiro & Mortola, 1996). Perspective-taking, reflective practice, and metacognition require practice and active guidance by experienced facilitators. In addition, knowledge and awareness of group processes and social interaction must be part of the training. These are essential if researchers are to have a better understanding of what they are participating in and observing, and of whom they are interviewing within what social contexts. Understanding process, the fact that we are constructing a narrative which has other versions and moments in time, requires explicit discussions of implicit values, beliefs and attitudes. Practice in metacognition and perspective-taking provides opportunities to withdraw from the interaction and on-going process for a period of time in order "to reflect on our intentions and interactions in the time just past ... to an inner place without expectations of what should happen (Brown, J. R., 1996, p. 76).

Confluent educators need to understand and appreciate the epistemologies and philosophical orientations of qualitative research in order to achieve the democratic principles so much a part of the Confluent tradition. They need to consciously address the "humanist ideal of a rational autonomous and responsible self", and the notion of individualism so strongly presented, and re-shape it into a version that includes interdependence (See Greenfield & Cocking, 1994). If we assume, as Shapiro's (1997) work indicates, that the primary focus of Confluent educators is on the humanistic emphasis and the individual, through awareness we can utilize the postmodern and critical theory notions of power and privilege to refocus the secondary emphasis that desires democratic change. This is an important conceptual point for Confluent educators to consider in the analysis of "self-as-special" and the need to encourage more broadly the values of democratic education and diversity embedded in interdependent communities.

The principle of democratic social change indicates three instructional values are of primary importance: awareness of the context or environment; an educational orientation toward change that benefits people and society; and an "instructional value that emphasizes social equity, consensus

and collaboration in learning" (Shapiro, 1997, p. 90). This is what directs us to study the "politics of everyday life and suspends the problematic legitimacy understood in terms of standard modern liberal normative framework with its talk of rights grounded in the nature of persons" (Peters, 1996, p. 7). The research narratives that we construct with others could be addressed from this focus given Confluent's emphasis on democratic social change. Furthermore, research can never be just a construction or the process of constructing a research narrative, it is embedded in the very way we conceptualize narratives and stories. Awareness of this personal process is critical to understanding the language, discourse and philosophical perspectives that encourage the use of metacognition, and propose an emphasis on interdependence.

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

Educational inquiry and research can be "an ethical and political act that is strongly connected to conflicts over knowledge, resources, and power outside as well as inside education, even when its practitioners wish otherwise" (Roman & Apple, 1990, p. 42). The basis for all research must begin and continue with reflection and awareness of our own perspectives and biases throughout the process. Critical theory pushes us away from a focus on self and the individual toward an examination of Western notions of ideology and rationality implicit in discourse. It challenges us to engage in active social change that includes other ways of knowing and perceiving the world. We are enjoined to examine our research narratives as not just value free constructions of a research process. It is only through an ability to "identify with another's experience–even when that experience is different from one's own–and to get beyond judgments of inferiority or superiority" that we can temporarily dispense with guardedness and move into the process of interaction (Brown, J. R., 1996, p. 23).

If we are to understand "research as story-telling–as 'constructed' and 'constructing' ... research that is at once illumunative, insightful, and emancipatory, but ... [that] can also be powerful, oppressive, and dangerous" (Usher, 1997, p. 41), we must find a coherent way to understand this process. We are reminded to ask not only what is my research finding out? – but also, Where is it coming from?; and What is it doing? The intersubjective qualities of research,

mutual construction of knowledge, and the need for descriptions based on context is supported in the principles of Confluent Education and realized in Qualitative Research. By implementing and actualizing these principles, we may begin to legitimate diversity and recognize multiple perspectives so that equity can be a successful reality in the human community that we create in classrooms.

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[1] For purposes here, I am using Michael Peter's (1996) conceptualization of these terms in that they "are now so commonly conflated that I have" not differentiated them throughout the text. In addition, the terms are "further complicated by the fact that a number of poststructuralists, including both Lyotard and Baudrillard, have systematically engaged the term "postmodernism" while others, such as Foucault, have confessed that they do not know what the term and its associated notion 'postmodernity' mean" (p. 19).

Table 1.

Examines seven characteristics and qualities associated with the four social science perspectives and Confluent Education. Based on the presentation, three characteristics are present in all five perspectives: Social Context; Reflection and/or Metacognition; and Process.

	Symbolic Interactionism	Social Constructivism	Postmodernism	Critical Theory	Confluent Education
Social Context	definitions determine meanings of actions	context gives words and actions meaning	reality is only in the moment, no absolute truth	justice, overtly political in nature, concern for social structure	democratic social change
Relationships: (Intra & Inter)	human interactions are the subject of interest	necessity of others in the construction of self, focus on the individual			primarily individualistic, interpersonal relationships
Feeling & Affect	ability to know others, perceive feelings & attitudes				important domain of being human
Reflection	participant's perceptions	intrapersonal reflection on beliefs, values and attitudes	essential to understanding & appreciation	awareness of personal assumptions essential to interpretation	awareness of personal assumptions
Metacognition			ability to step back from the process	acknowledgment that perceptions differ, and need to understand metaphors & symbols	essential for gaining awareness of different perspectives

Narrative		lived experience of participants important in the construction of a research product	importance of the narrative text based on individual participants		representative of what we construct, the end product
Process Orientation	focus primarily on the process of interaction	life is a constructing process	process more important than outcomes	how contexts are examined, ability to step back	continuing process of the individual in relationship to others and the context

Table 2.

A comparison of the four social science paradigms discussed and Confluent Education based on philosophical perspectives and theorists, and the qualitative research methodology theorists associated with that perspective.

	Symbolic Interactionism	Social Constructivism	Postmodernism	Critical Theory	Confluent Education
Philosophical Perspectives	Interactionism, American Pragmatism	Phenomenology, Existentialism, Constructivism, Humanism	Examination of Phenomenology and Existentialism	Some postmodernist and poststructuralist notions, Pragmatism, Feminism	Phenomenology, existentialism, Gestalt Theory, Humanism
Philosophical Theorists	Blumer, Dewey, Mead, Goffman, Gergen	Husserl, Heidegger Merleau-Ponty Vygotsky, Piaget	Derrida, Foucault, Baudrillard, Frankfurt School, Habermas	Derrida, Foucault Dewey, James, Friere, Macedo, Aronowitz, Giroux	Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Wertheimer, Koffka, & Lewin
Methodology Theorists	Glaser & Strauss, Miles & Huberman Bogdan & Biklen Denzin	Guba & Lincoln, Berger & Luckman	Denzin, Van Maanen	Lather, McLaren, Berg, Carspecken, Heshusius, Stringer	Spindlers, Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba

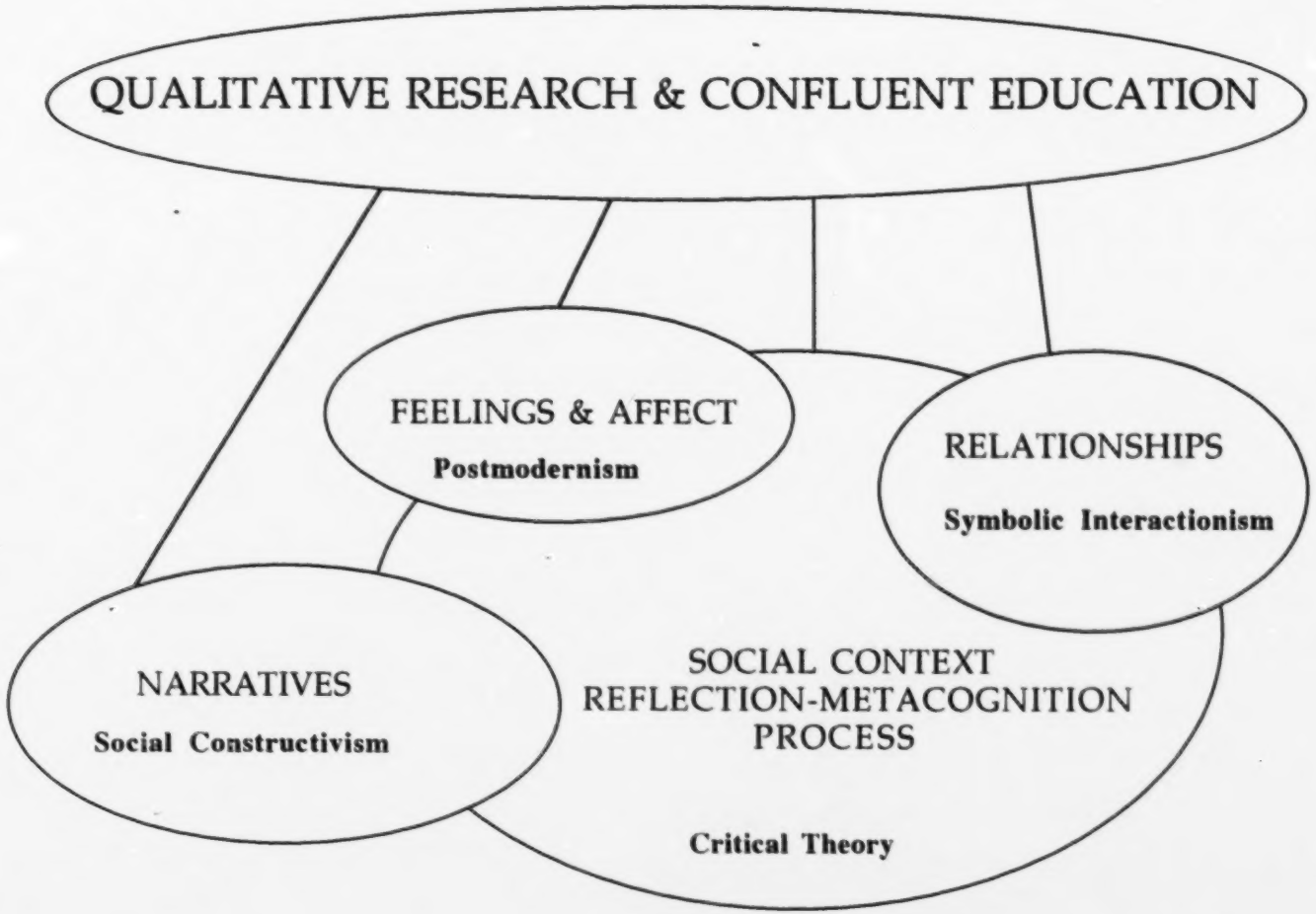

Figure 1.

A representation of the characteristics of Confluent Education, and the overlapping qualities and assumptions in symbolic interactionism, social constructivism, postmodernism, and critical theory.